

# A Special Day for the International Reading Association

The International Reading Association recognizes outstanding literacy programs through an annual UNESCO International Reading Association Literacy Prize, presented since 1979 on International Literacy Day. The US\$20,000 award has benefited programs throughout the world, including many in economically and educationally disadvantaged regions. The Association also sponsors an annual celebration of International Literacy Day in Washington, DC, that includes representatives from many organizations that share a commitment to worldwide literacy, including partners involved in international literacy projects.

Coinciding with the beginning of a new school year in many countries, International Literacy Day comes at an ideal time to recognize the role literacy plays in everyone's life. A growing number of International Reading Association Honor Councils involve their members and communities in International Literacy Day activities at the state and provincial levels, and many national affiliates celebrate the day by presenting awards or organizing special events. Classroom teachers, librarians, clubs, and communities use this special day to promote reading.



To find out more about  
International Literacy Day,  
visit UNESCO at  
[www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)  
and the  
International Reading Association at  
[www.reading.org](http://www.reading.org).

An **IRA Celebration Kit**,  
with materials to help in the planning  
or sponsoring of an  
International Literacy Day event,  
can be requested by e-mailing  
[irawash@reading.org](mailto:irawash@reading.org).



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# International Literacy Day





# September 8 is International Literacy Day



## Promoting Literacy... A Reason to Celebrate

International Literacy Day is a time for reflection and celebration. Each year on September 8, a community of nations hosts local and national events that recognize the value of literacy to individuals, families, and communities.

Thousands of reading professionals and volunteers are recognized for their daily work and dedication. The newly literate are applauded for their persistence and encouraged to go on learning. Leaders recommit to policies and practices that give hope to those marginalized by their lack of education, skills, and knowledge, including an estimated 860 million adults (two thirds of whom are women) who do not know how to read or write and more than 100 million children, again the majority female, who lack access to school.

## Why September 8?

In September 1966, the World Conference of Ministers of Education on the Eradication of Illiteracy was held in Tehran, Iran. One recommendation resulting from this meeting was to proclaim September 8, the opening date of the conference, International Literacy Day. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) inaugurated its official observance of International Literacy Day in 1967.

## International Literacy Initiatives

The international community is involved in several initiatives that focus on education and development. Education for All (EFA), a commitment launched in 1990 and reaffirmed in 2000, set the goal of increasing literacy rates by 50% by 2015. Two of EFA's specific goals are included in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) adopted by 189 countries, civil society groups, and development agencies. The United Nations adopted a resolution in 2001 to make 2003–2012 the Literacy Decade. This initiative demonstrates the collective will of countries facing literacy challenges and those in a position to provide assistance to promote literacy.

## International Literacy Awards

For 37 years, UNESCO has recognized meritorious literacy programs by awarding prizes on International Literacy Day. Programs are nominated for the awards below by national governments or international non-governmental agencies. An international jury appointed by the Director-General of UNESCO reviews the applications and makes recommendations. The prizes are

- The UNESCO International Reading Association Literacy Prize, created in 1979 and sponsored by the International Reading Association, a nongovernmental educational organization with members in more than 100 countries throughout the world.
- Two UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prizes, created in 1989 and sponsored by the government of the Republic of Korea.
- Two UNESCO Confucius Prizes for Literacy, launched in 2005 and sponsored by the government of the People's Republic of China, which include a study visit to literacy project sites in China.

